

The Ten Commandments

Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33

Deuteronomy 4:44-49 - *“Now this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel. ⁴⁵ These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt, ⁴⁶ on this side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel defeated after they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁷ And they took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, who were on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, ⁴⁸ from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon, even to Mount Sion (that is, Hermon), ⁴⁹ and all the plain on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah.”*

Deuteronomy 5:1-21 – *“And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. ² The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive. ⁴ The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. ⁵ I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain.*

He said: ⁶ ‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ⁷ ‘You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁸ ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁹ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, ¹⁰ but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. ¹¹ ‘You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

¹² ‘Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. ¹⁶ ‘Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

¹⁷ ‘You shall not murder. ¹⁸ ‘You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁹ ‘You shall not steal. ²⁰ ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ²¹ ‘You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Background Notes

Deuteronomy 4:44-49 summarized Israel's recent battles on the east side of the Jordan River and their victories over the two major kings of the Amorites – Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh would settle on this conquered land.

Moses' second address was spoken 40 years after God gave the Law at Mount Sinai. It was a review of the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, beginning with a repetition of the Ten Commandments. If someone were to ask you "Where are the Ten Commandments in the Bible?" you'd probably say, "Exodus 20" - and you'd be right! God gave the Law to Israel at Mount Sinai, soon after they crossed the Red Sea. And in Deuteronomy 5, Moses reviewed the Ten Commandments, right before the people entered the Promised Land. Remember - after 40 years in the wilderness, a whole new generation was going to enter the Land, so as a review and a reminder Moses' second address began with the Ten Commandments.

What was meant in verse 3? *"The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive."* Most likely it means that this covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, was not given to the "fathers" – namely, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). They had the Abrahamic Covenant, but they didn't have the Mosaic Covenant. The Ten Commandments and the Law were given to the nation of Israel – the nation that God had redeemed out of Egypt. Now this nation was ready to go into the Land.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Ten Commandments were given for keeping.

Why did God give the Law? Galatians 3 says that the Law was given to show God's perfect standards. It showed that anything less than perfection was sin. The Law was intended to lead us to faith in Christ because we realized we couldn't keep God's perfect Law. So should we keep the Law today? Not as a means of salvation, because Romans 10:4 says, *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."* God's Law pointed toward Christ as the coming great Sacrifice for sin. Salvation comes by trusting in Christ as our personal Savior because He died on the cross for our sins, as our Substitute. So we cannot earn our salvation by keeping the Law. And by the way, we don't keep the Law to gain sanctification, either!

As Christians, our aim and goal is to love and serve our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so we'll come much closer to keeping the Law - more than if we tried to do so in our own strength. As Romans 8:3-4 says, *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* Christians don't make keeping the Ten Commandments our goal in life - but as we follow Jesus Christ we'll certainly keep the moral aspects of the Law, with the Lord's help.

All the **moral** requirements of the Old Testament Law are found in the New Testament, under the “law of Christ,” because **God’s moral standards never change**. The **civil and ceremonial laws** of the Mosaic Covenant ended with the coming of Jesus Christ. The commandment to “keep the Sabbath holy” is not found in the New Testament – it’s the only one of the Ten Commandments that was not repeated. That’s because it was civil and ceremonial - not moral. Resting one day a week, and taking time to worship the Lord and set our priorities straight – these are important **moral principles** for Christians. But keeping the Sabbath as under the Mosaic Covenant, or legalistically making Sunday “the new Sabbath” would not be biblical.

The Sabbath rest was good for servants and animals and every member of the family (v14). Everyone needs a day of rest! Verse 15 gave the reason why they had to keep the Sabbath. This principle certainly applies today. We, too, should take time out to reflect on God as the Creator of this world, and the one who has redeemed us and made us new creatures in Christ.

The second commandment (v8-10) does not mean that it’s wrong to paint landscapes or make sculptures. No. Think of the artwork that was connected with the Tabernacle, for example! The second commandment prohibits making anything that is to be used for **idolatry**. This may speak to the use of religious statues and icons. The Ten Commandments were given for keeping.

2. The Ten Commandments were given for blessing.

Deuteronomy 5:22-33 - *“These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.”* ²³ *“So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders.”* ²⁴ *And you said: ‘Surely the Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives.’* ²⁵ *Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die.’* ²⁶ *For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?* ²⁷ *You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.’*

²⁸ *“Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.’* ²⁹ *Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!* ³⁰ *Go and say to them, “Return to your tents.”* ³¹ *But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I am giving them to possess.’*

³² *“Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”*³³ *You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”*

Their time at Mount Sinai when the Law was given was an awesome experience for the children of Israel (v22-26). The reactions and the responses of the people were good. They showed great respect for the holiness of God. They asked Moses to go near and hear all that the Lord had commanded, and promised that they would do it.

It's important to realize that God did not give the Law just to show His standards and make us realize that we need a Savior. He also gave the Law so that His people would be blessed! Think of all the laws in the Mosaic Covenant that protected the people's health. And look at verse 29, *“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever.”* And verse 33, *“You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”* So don't think of the Ten Commandments and God's Law in a negative way. It's positive! Notice the promise associated with the fifth commandment in verse 16: *“Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”* The Ten Commandments were given for blessing!

Practical Application

Don't limit the eighth commandment to money and materials!

The eighth commandment is: *“You shall not steal.”* This general commandment covers more than just the stealing of money or material possessions. We can steal by falsifying accounts, such as work reports. We can steal a person's reputation by gossip and false rumors. We can steal by not returning borrowed items. We can wrongly steal a person's affections. We can steal from God by not giving back what we owe Him in worship, and praise, and service.

Are you a thief in any of these areas? Don't limit the eighth commandment to money and possessions!